

News release

GREENPEACE

Historic climate lawsuit against Arctic oil goes to court

15 February 2017 (Toronto) — A district court in Norway has agreed to hear a historic climate case this November that has been filed against the Norwegian government by Nature and Youth and Greenpeace Nordic.

This is the first court case to oppose new oil drilling on the basis of the Paris Agreement, and is a signal to politicians that citizens will take action to hold them accountable to the pact. The hearing will start November 13 and continue for two weeks. The case argues that the government's decision to grant new oil drilling licenses in the Arctic Ocean contravenes the Paris Agreement and violates the right to a healthy and safe environment for current and future generations, which is protected by the Norwegian constitution.

“This court case is about making governments everywhere responsible for the environment and accountable for their climate promises,” said Truls Gulowsen, a climate and energy campaigner with Greenpeace Nordic. “By allowing oil companies to drill in the Arctic, the Norwegian government puts homes, health and families everywhere at risk.”

This is the first time in 20 years the Norwegian government has opened up a new oil drilling area in the Barents Sea, allowing Statoil, Chevron, and eleven other oil companies to start new exploration campaigns in the Arctic. Statoil has already announced that they will drill this summer.

The plaintiffs argue that the licences cannot be reconciled with Norway's commitments under the Paris Agreement to ambitiously reduce its emissions and help limit the global temperature increase to 1.5 °C.

In December 2016, the Trudeau government placed a moratorium on new offshore oil and gas licenses in the Canadian Arctic, to be reviewed in five years through a climate assessment. The promise of a climate test was implicit acknowledgement that new projects may be incompatible with Canada's climate commitments. It is unclear how the ban will impact existing projects, such as the approved program of seismic blasting in search of Arctic oil in Canada's Baffin Bay and Davis Strait, which Clyde River Inuit are currently fighting in a landmark Supreme Court case.

“Oil producers around the world are grappling with what the Paris Agreement means for the future of the industry, and the fact that it will likely force them to leave much of their resources in the ground,” said Alex Speers-Roesch, an Arctic campaigner with Greenpeace Canada. “This lawsuit could give the Paris Agreement some serious legal teeth in Norway, and it will set an important example for Canada and other producers on how the commitments made in Paris put limits on oil exploration activities.”

This case is part of a global wave of climate litigation aimed at holding governments and big polluters to account. Current cases include the human rights complaint in the Philippines, Our Children's Trust case in the USA, and the Climate Grannies case in Switzerland.

Canadian artist and activist Audrey Siegl of the Musqueam First Nation — who was in Oslo to participate in filing the lawsuit last October — said, “As a First Nations woman, I recognize that allowing the oil industry to dig up every last drop of oil would be a terrible injustice and crime against life itself. It would violate the rights of people around the world to a healthy environment. We each have a duty to preserve and protect the natural world. We must remember and honour the fact that all life is sacred.”

Images and video available here: <http://media.greenpeace.org/collection/27MZIFJJXOSY5>

Link to the legal writ submitted to Oslo District Court:

http://www.greenpeace.org/norway/Global/norway/Arktis/Dokumenter/2016/legal_writ_english_final_2016_1018.pdf

Nature and Youth is a youth organisation with branches all across Norway. They are connected to Young Friends of the Earth Europe, but it is the organisation in Norway that is a plaintiff in the case.

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